

*The WORKS of CHRIST proved
to be Supernatural and Divine :*

IN A
SERMON

Preach'd in the Chappel in

OKEHAMPTON,

MAY the 6th, 1730.

AT THE

VISITATION

Of the Reverend the

Arch-Deacon of *Totnes.*

By THEOPHILUS BLACKALL, M. A.
Rector of *Monk-Okehampton* in *Devon*, and
Fellow of *St. Katherine's Hall* in *Cambridge.*

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THE WORKS OF CHRIST PRESENTED
to the Supernatural and Divine:

IN A
SERMON

Preached in the Chapel in

OKEHAMPTON

MAY the 6th 1750

AT THE

VISITATION



ARTHUR DEAN

BY JACOBUS BLACKALL, M. A.

of the Chapel in Okehampton, and
of the Bishop's Hall in Salisbury.

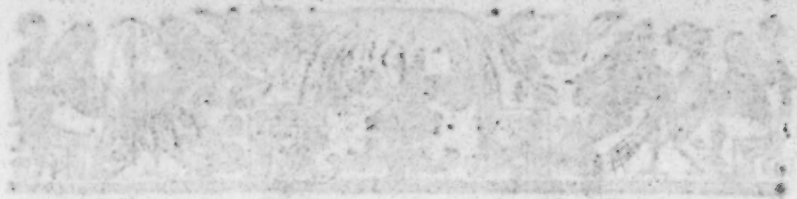
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To the Reverend
Mr. Nicholas Kendall,
Arch-Deacon of *Totnes,*
AND
The Reverend the Clergy
OF THE
DEANRIES of *Okehampton*
and *Houlworthy,*
THIS SERMON,
Preach'd before them, and published at
their Request,
IS
With the sincerest Respect and Affection,
Most humbly inscrib'd.



To the Reverend

Mr. Nicholas Kendall

Arch-Bishop of York

AND

The Reverend the Clergy

OF THE

Diocese of Cambridge

and Lincoln

THIS SERMON

Preached before them and published at
their Request

1721

With the fullest Respect and Affection

Most humbly intended



JOHN xii. 37.

*But tho' he had done so many Miracles
before them, yet they believed not on
him.*



WHEN the very Foundations of Christianity are openly struck at; when Atheists and Infidels shoot out their Arrows, even bitter Words, against GOD and Religion; when the Saving Truths of the Gospel are exposed as idle Tales, and the mighty Works of our Saviour traduced as Lying Wonders; as it highly behoves every one that is concern'd for God or himself to be upon his Guard, so it is in a more especial manner the Duty of us who are Ministers of Christ, and Stewards of the Mysteries of God, to stand up in Defence of our most holy Religion, and to contend earnestly for that *Faith which was once deliver'd to the Saints.*

I presume, therefore, I need not make any Apology for undertaking to vindicate that common Argument for the Truth of Christianity which is drawn from the many wonderful

derful Works that were wrought to confirm it. An Argument that hath stood the Test of all Times, and the more it has been sifted and canvass'd has ever appear'd the more strong and convincing. And yet this Consideration hath not discouraged the Adversaries of Religion, in every Age, from attacking it, even here, where it is the best guarded. So gross is the Stupidity, so inveterate the Malice, of the Enemies of Truth! To this Purpose, one asserts, that the Miracles of Christ were nothing but the regular Effects of Nature; another, that they were merely Illusions of the Senses; and a third, that they were the Workings of Satan: All of them to their own Confusion, and the Triumph of Christianity. Our Religion stands the firmer for being opposed, and its Divine Authority is more unquestionable by being disputed. A very little Observation upon the Management of the Controversy will abundantly satisfy us, that the same Cause to which the Evangelist *here* attributes the Infidelity of the Antient Jews we may likewise justly assign of the Infidelity of our modern Unbelievers, namely, that it proceeds from the Heart, and not from the Head, and is owing not so much to the Want of Evidence as the Want of Will; that their Inclinations are corrupt and Affections vicious; that they are blinded with Prejudice and led by Passion, and are in every respect such Persons as the Prophet *Isaiah* has long since describ'd, *who hear indeed, but understand not; who see indeed, but perceive not; a People whose Heart is made fat, whose Ears are made heavy, and whose Eyes are closed; lest they should see with their Eyes, and hear with their Ears, and understand with their Heart,*

Heart, and be converted and healed. Hence it comes to pass, that tho' our Saviour has done so many Miracles before innumerable Witnesses, whose Testimony they can neither deny nor disprove, yet they obstinately refuse to believe on him. Their Opposition to Christ and his Gospel is far from being grounded upon any rational Objection against either the *Nature* or the *Evidence* of his Works, but proceeds purely from the Contrariety of his Doctrines to their Lusts and Passions, from their Carelessness and wilful Stupidity, from their Pride and Ambition, and Self conceit. This is the true Account of Mens Unbelief both in former and later Ages. These are the only Reasons upon which they can possibly ground their Aversion to Christianity; and these, it must be own'd, are very strong and sufficient Reasons for this Purpose. But then they are such as our Infidels may be justly ashamed of, and will probably disown; because all their Force and Prevalency, as great as it is, proceeds not from the Nature of Things, but the Corruption of their own Wills. Upon which Account it would be but lost Labour to endeavour their Conviction, by shewing them that the true and only Grounds upon which their Infidelity is founded do rather exaggerate than justify their Sin. My Purpose therefore, at this Time, is, in the Sequel of this Discourse, after I have premised a Word or two concerning the *Nature* and *Evidence* of Miraculous Works in General, to examine those Reasons which our Infidels must own, if they will own any Reason at all for their not believing on Jesus Christ, for the sake of those Works which he performed of that Kind.

Now, if it ever happens that any Work is perform'd, or Appearance produc'd, at the bare Word or Instance of a *Man*, which is beyond the utmost Stretch of *Human* Power to effect, and is manifestly beside the Order, above the Force, and contrary to the Laws of Motion whereby Material Bodies are determin'd to act among themselves; that Work or Appearance must of Necessity be ascrib'd to some Superiour and Intelligent Being: *Superiour* as surpassing the Power of Man, and *intelligent* as impressing new Motions upon inanimate Matter. This superiour intelligent Being must be either *God* himself, or some created *Spirit*. Of created Spirits there are two Sorts, one of which are *God's* Minist'ring Angels, who are always employ'd in Conformity to his Will, and, when permitted, to interpose in, this lower World for the Benefit of Mankind: The other, which kept not their first Estate, who always act in Opposition to their Creator, and, if ever let loose upon the Earth, for the Ruin and Delusion of Men. If therefore the Supernatural Work be produced by the Assistance and Co-operation of *Evil* Spirits, then the *Man* who is the Instrument of its Production is in Alliance with the sworn Enemies both of *God* and Men, and the Doctrines he preaches are the Doctrines of Devils, tending to bring in damnable Heresies, and to drown the World in Destruction and Perdition. But if the Power whereby this Supernatural Work is perform'd is the Power either of *God* himself or of his *good* Spirits, then the *Man* entrusted with it, or assisted by it, is highly favoured by Heaven, his Cause is the Cause of *God*, and the Employment he is sent upon must

must be presum'd to be for the Blessing of Mankind.

From what hath been here observ'd in general it follows, That the Evidence of our Saviour's Works, in Proof of the Doctrine he taught, depends upon a Supposition of their being both *supernatural* and *divine*; that is to say, that they could not have been effected but by some Extraordinary Power *superiour* to Man, and that that Superiour Power was really and in Fact the Power of *God*. If this Supposition is doubtful or precarious, then the Enemies of the Christian Revelation might have some tolerable Plea for their Sin of Infidelity; but if this Supposition is true, and can be plainly proved to be so, then, as our Saviour has long since determin'd in the Case, they are condemned already, and can have no Cloak for their Sin, as stifling the most rational Motives of Conviction, and wilfully shutting their Eyes against the Light.

I purpose therefore now to prove the Truth of this Supposition in *both* its Parts; to shew you that the wondrous Works perform'd by our Saviour were not only *supernatural* but *divine*; that as our Senses inform us in the one, so our Reason must convince us of the other.

But here I think it will not be improper to premise this one Thing; that, in speaking to these Points, I do now take it for granted that the Matters of Fact recorded in the Gospels are true; that is to say, that our Saviour did really do those Works, and preach that Doctrine, which the holy Evangelists, or the Books which go under their Names, say He did do and teach. And this I hope I may be allow'd to suppose, because it's what is confirmed

med by stronger Evidence than any Thing else of the like Nature and Antiquity, and was never denied or disputed by those who were most concern'd and best able to inform themselves in the Matter. Having premised this, I proceed now to prove, in the first Place,

I. That the Works ascrib'd to our Saviour were *supernatural*, really and properly speaking *miraculous*, that they were neither *natural* nor *artificial* Effects, but transcended the Contrivance of *Man* and the Powers of *Nature*. It may be pretended, that the mighty Works, which we are told were done by our Saviour, were indeed very unusual and extraordinary; but, notwithstanding this, we can't positively say but that they might be wrought by Trick, by Slight of Hand, by a Confederacy in the Cheat; or however that they might be as much caused by the same Laws of Matter and Motion, tho' unknown to us, as the most common and ordinary Effects are, and for that Reason more enquired into, and better understood; and consequently that we have no Reason or Occasion to impute them to the extraordinary Interposition of Almighty God, or of any other intelligent invisible Being whatsoever. Thus, I say, the Infidel, to avoid this Evidence of our Saviour's Divine Mission, may argue. But, to shew how groundless and inconsistent these Suggestions are, I have nothing more to do than to appeal to the History where these Works are particularly recorded, and to observe of them here in General, that they were for *Nature and Quality* great and stupendous; for *Number* infinite, and of various Kinds; for *Effect* useful and permanent; for
Man-

Manner of Performance publick and undistinguish'd ; and for *Continuance* lasting and uninterrupted during even the whole Time of his Ministry. *Then the Eyes of the Blind were opened, and the Ears of the Deaf were unstopped ; then did the Lame Man leap as an Hart, and the Tongue of the Dumb sing.* All manner of the most incurable Infirmities were instantly cured, at a Word's speaking, with a Touch, or at a Distance ; by the Use of no Means at all, or such as were plainly disproportionate to the Effect. *He spake the Word, and it was done ; he commanded, and it came to pass.* Constant Experience had taught the People, that there went *Vertue* out of him ; insomuch that *whithersoever he entered, into Villages, or City, or Country, they laid the Sick in the Streets, and besought him that they might touch if it were but the Border of his Garment ; and as many as touched it were made whole.* The Elements themselves where at his Command, and alter'd their Natures at the same Word which first of all spake them into Being. He turned Water into good Wine, and walked on the Billows as on firm Land. *He stilled the Raging of the Seas, and checked the boisterous Winds into Silence.* The *Extent* of his Power was equal to its *Greatness*, and exerted its Force in the Regions above. A Choir of the Heavenly Host usher'd in his Birth, a Voice from Heaven proclaim'd his Unction with the Holy Ghost, and the whole Frame of Nature seem'd to be dissolved at his Death. The Angels of God watched for his Preservation, minister'd to him in his Necessities, and comforted him in his Agonies. The Dead in their Graves heard his powerful Voice, and Souls departed returned to their former

former Habitations. *With Authority* he commanded the Unclean Spirits, and even the Devils were subject unto him. In fine, after he had been publickly put to Death, he shewed himself alive again by many infallible Proofs, and was at length, in the Presence of many Witnesses, while they beheld, taken up, and a Cloud received him out of Sight. And as he thus excelled all others in the *Number* and *Kind* of his Miracles, so did he likewise as to the *Nature of the Power* whereby he wrought them. This was not only great and extensive, but *inherent* and within himself. He was able to communicate it to whom he pleas'd, and actually did confer it upon the First Believers. *And there are also many other Things which Jesus did, the which if they should be written every one,* it is the Opinion of an Eye-witness, that *even the World itself could not contain the Books that should be written.* This was the highest rational Testimony that Almighty God ever did, or, as we presume, ever will, give to any Man. These were Works so very Great and Extraordinary, and carry with them so many visible Signs of Omnipotency, that as no one of Common Sense but will perceive that their Performance was beyond the Compass of *Human Retch* and Abilities, so no one but a downright Atheist dare affirm that they were *natural* Effects. Even the bitterest Enemies that Christ ever had, I mean the wicked Pharisees of his own Time, had not the Confidence to bring this Charge against them. Unless they had been abundantly satisfied that his Miracles were real, they would have had no Need to have blasphemed the Power that wrought them: They would not
surely

surely have been so hard put to it, as, contrary to all Sense and Reason, to ascribe them to the Prince of the Devils, had they thought there had been but a *bare Possibility* of their being effected by Ordinary and Natural Causes.

True, perhaps will the *Infidel* say, they cou'd not think there was, consistently with their own Principles. They had been brought up in a Belief of Miracles, and the Whole of their Religion was grounded upon it. But then their Prejudices and false Opinion ought by no Means to sway our Judgment. We grant, that if we were to believe in their *Moses*, upon the Score of what he is said to have done, we shou'd have much better Reason to believe in your Christ, for the sake of the far more mighty Works which seemed to shew forth themselves in Him. But we deny that either of them did any Thing, but what perfectly agreed with the standing Laws of Nature; tho' the Examples of that Kind being few, and the Circumstances which produced them unusual, we must needs acknowledge ourselves to be at a Loss, for Want of sufficient Observation and Experience, to account for them clearly.

This false and inconclusive Way of Arguing hath been often and sufficiently exposed: It shall be enough therefore to observe upon this Occasion:

That these Works of our Saviour have not passed upon the World for *Miracles* merely because we knew not how to account for them by *Natural Causes*, but because we know so well what wou'd *naturally* have come to pass in those Instances, as to see plainly, that what

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did

did actually follow was *supernatural*. And that it is not Mens Want of Experience in the Course of Nature which has made them judge these Things *unaccountable* by it; but rather their continued Observations, and the Experience of many hundred Years, have given them sufficient Grounds of Assurance of their being directly *repugnant* to it. But further;

If it be really true, as they pretend, I mean, that the extraordinary Works related of Our Saviour were the proper Effects of mere Natural Causes, how comes it to pass there are so few of this Kind to be met with, and that Nature does not exert herself now as she did in some former Ages? It is supposed, and the Whole of their Argument is built upon this Principle, that the same Natural Effects *always* follow the same Natural Causes; for where they do not, there is that *miraculous* Interposition which we contend for in some Cases, and they deny in *all*. Why then is not the same Appearance always produced in the like Circumstances, and by the same Application? If the Touch of a Finger, or the Speaking of a Word, cou'd by Natural Effect make a Blind Man see, and a Dead Man live, in Our Saviour's Time, how comes it they do not the same now-a-days, when spoken or applied after the same Manner? Why, to this perhaps they'll say, that these and the other wondrous Things that are ascribed to Christ were owing to a very extraordinary and unusual Concurrence of Natural Causes, which scarcely ever fell out before, and, for ought we know, may be never observed again. Well, but then, not to take Notice that this is a mere

mere Shift and Evasion, there being no manner of Ground for any such Supposition, it may be fairly asked, in the next Place,

How this Unusual Concurrence of Natural Causes came to happen so frequently in and about Our Saviour's Time, in those Places where He Himself or his Apostles resided; so as scarcely to be ever observed in any other Age or Country of the World; and even then and there only by his Presence, or at his Command, or by the Use of his Name? If their Account be true, this seems to be as great a *Wonder* as any we contend for. But

Lastly: Supposing they cou'd give a clear Account of these Matters, yet, the great Mystery of *all* is *still* behind; and that is since, according to them, these Appearances were caused by an extraordinary Combination of some unknown and secret Powers in Nature, how Our Saviour cou'd come to the Knowledge of the precise Time when there wou'd be such a lucky Concurrence of these secret Causes, or of the exact Manner in which they wou'd please to exert Themselves. Observation and Experience, which is the best Guide in other Matters, was the very worst in these, and that for this plain Reason, because they were *contrary* to Observation and Experience. And the Instances of this Kind had happened so seldom before, that there cou'd not be the least Ground for Conjecture when they wou'd happen again. Tell us, therefore, by what Art *He* knew so well when these unknown Causes wou'd work, as to be never out of his Guess, or disappointed in his Undertaking: Whereas other Men, of ten times the Learning and Education with Him, might have

tried the same Things a thousand Times over, and not so much as once have met with the same Success? Surely such *Knowledge*, as this is supposed to be, is too Wonderful and Excellent for Man to attain to; and is indeed in Nothing behind-hand the very *Power* in Dispute.

And thus I think it appears, notwithstanding what hath been surmised to the contrary, that Christ did indeed many true and real Miracles: That the Mighty Works which shew'd forth Themselves in Him were not bounded by the universal Laws of Matter and Motion; that they neither agreed with them, nor cou'd follow from them.

And as it is thus proved from the Evidence of Sense, that these Works performed by Christ were really *Miraculous*, and required a *Supernatural* Power to effect, so it shall now be proved by the Evidence of Reason, that they were *Divine*: That is, That the Supernatural Power employed in their Production was the Power of God himself.

And I suppose it will be readily granted, that if Our Lord's Miracles were not wrought by the Power of *Evil* Spirits, then they were wrought by the Power of God; for there is no Medium between these two, besides the Power of *Good* Spirits; and we are sure they will never exert Themselves but in Subserviency to God. And, consequently, what is not done by *Evil* Spirits, is, in effect, done by God himself; as being done either by his own immediate Hand, or, which comes to the same Thing, by his special Command and Direction. The clearest and shortest Way, therefore, to prove the *Divinity* of Christ's Miracles, is to

to prove the Impossibility of their being effected by the Power of the *Devil*, and to point out the gross Absurdities of such an Opinion. And to this Purpose I must offer these following Things to be considered.

1. That the Miracles performed by Our Lord were very *many*, and exceeding *great*; more and greater than those of *Moses*, or of any other Prophet; more and greater than all the Miracles of every Man put together, from the very Beginning of the World to this Day, excepting only those of his own Apostles and immediate Followers; and yet even these too must be ascribed to *Him*, in as much as they were done in his Name, and by his Authority. To say, therefore, that *Christ* did his Miracles by a Confederacy with *Evil* Spirits, is all one as to say, that a vile *Impostor* has given more ample Testimony of his being sent from Above, than ever was, or can be, given by any *True* Prophet; and that the Sovereign Lord of the Creation, *who*, according to the *Jewish* Scripture itself, *only doth great Wonders*, hath been fairly conquered, and out-done by the Devil, in such Operations.

2. That *none* of Our Saviour's Miracles were owing to the Help of the Devil, is, I think, undeniable for this Reason, because *some* of them were absolutely beyond his Power: I instance particularly in raising the Dead, and feeding Five Thousand with a few Loaves and Two small Fishes. For who cou'd restore Life to a Man that was dead, but He *with whom are the Issues of Life and Death*? Or who cou'd prepare so large a Table in the Wilderness, but He who openeth his Hand, and filleth all Things living with Plenteousness? We need not therefore

fore on this Argument puzzle ourselves to enquire what the Devil can do ; it is sufficient to our Purpose to know what he cannot do. And that neither He, nor any created Being whatsoever, is endued with a Power of creating Matter, or of re-animating the Dead, is the Voice of Reason supported by the concurrent Opinion of all Mankind. It is plain therefore in the Nature of the Thing, that He *cou'd* not assist Our Lord in the doing of those Works, wherein these Powers were so illustriously exerted ; and it is no less plain by undeniable Inference, that He *did* not assist Him in any other Works, wherein it may be granted these Powers were not so visibly concerned ; in as much as all and each of Christ's Miracles were wrought for the same Purpose and Design. So that to prove that *any* must be, is, in effect, to prove, that *all* were wrought by the Power of God.

3. The same Conclusion may be also clearly deduced from the Consideration of their *Kind* and *Quality*. All our Saviour's Miracles were complicated Acts of *Goodness* and *Power*, and shewed at the same Time both the Tenderness of his Heart and the Strength of his Arm. To multiply a few Loaves and Two small Fishes into more than a Sufficiency for the the craving Appetites of above Five Thousand Men, was *wonderful* and *astonishing* ; but to do this for a Multitude of poor People, hungry and faint, was exceeding *kind* and *bountiful*. The Raising *Lazarus* from the Dead was, doubtless, an Instance of the Highest Power ; but then to exercise this Power for the Sake of his disconsolate Sisters was also an Instance of the greatest *Mercy* and *Compassion*.

tion. And the same might be truly said of *all* Our Lord's Miracles, as well as these: That they were stamped with the plainest Signatures of *Divinity* in every Respect, as being *Great* and *Good*, *Mighty* and *Beneficent*, Works of *Wonder*, and Works of *Mercy*. Had they been derived from the *Devil*, they wou'd, doubtless, have bore a Resemblance of their Parent, and tended more to grieve and torment than to relieve and comfort Mankind; for he *goeth about as a Roaring Lion, seeking whom he may devour*. But it is *God* alone whose *Mercy* is in *all his Works*.

4. That the Devil had nothing to do in Our Saviour's Miracles, is evident to a Demonstration, because several of them were wrought in direct Opposition to his *Person*. I mean such of them as ejected him out of those miserable Men whose Bodies he had taken Possession of, and grievously tormented. This Argument is set by our Saviour himself in a very clear Light; and I shall not pretend to give it you in any better Words than his own. The Occasion of his making use of it was this: There had been brought unto him one possessed with a Devil, blind and dumb, whom he healed so effectually, that the Blind and Dumb both spake and saw. A Cure so great, and so instantaneously wrought, made all the People very rationally conclude, that he must be the Messiah, who had been so long promised, and was then universally expected to appear. The haughty Pharisees, filled with Envy, and scorning to submit to the Judgment of the Multitude, maliciously ascribed this, and all other his Miracles of the same Kind, to *Beelzebub*, who being the Prince and Ruler of the Devils,

Devils, cou'd, they pretended, exercise his Authority upon them, and, if he so pleased, enable his Instruments to cast them out. Our Lord, to vindicate Himself from the vile Insinuation, makes use of this familiar but cogent Argument: *Every Kingdom divided against itself is brought to Desolation: And every City or House divided against itself shall not stand. And if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself; how shall then his Kingdom stand?* So manifestly absurd it is to suppose, that if the Devil (who is acknowledged to be a Spirit of great Cunning and Subtily) had the Power, that yet he wou'd have the Will to perform such Operations as these, which do so naturally and effectually tend to the Ruin of his own Authority, by exasperating his faithful Servants, and raising a civil War in his Kingdom. And at the Close of this admirable Defence of Himself from their ill-grounded and malicious Aspersions, he further makes this pertinent Observation: *How can one enter into a strong Man's House, and spoil his Goods, except he first bind the strong Man? and then he will spoil his House.* The Application whereof to Our Saviour's Purpose is very obvious and easy, viz. That his dispossessing Satan of his Goods, by turning him out of those whom he had taken Possession of, is an undeniable Evidence that he had got the Mastery over him; and that the Power whereby he did this was vastly superiour to the utmost Efforts of the Enemy, in as much as it so plainly routed and vanquished him in his own Dominions. An Argument so convincing, and withal so evident, that it neither can, nor needs be further urged or illustrated.

5. The Absurdity of ascribing *Christ's* Miracles to Magick Art and a Confederacy with the Devil, is, I think, abundantly plain, if we consider, that for the same Reason that we ascribe the Miracles of *Christ* to the Powers of Hell, we must ascribe *all other* Miracles of *any other* Man to the same Cause; inasmuch as no one, either by the Course of his Life, or the Tendency of his Preaching, or the Nature of his Works, or the Manner of performing them, ever did or can give better Proof to the World of his Innocency in this Matter than what was given and appealed to by *Christ*. So that to impute *his* Ability of working Miracles to a Correspondence with the Powers of Darkness, is all one as to ascribe the Miracles of *Moses* and the *Prophets*, nay, all the Miracles that ever have been, or may hereafter be, to the same evil Cause. A Proceeding so highly and manifestly absurd, that it may suffice just to have mentioned it. But

6. Lastly; The Divinity of the *Doctrine* which our Saviour preached is a clear Evidence of the Divinity of the *Miracles* that were wrought to support it. The very Design of our Saviour's coming into the World, and the Purport of all his preaching was to *destroy the Works of the Devil*; to withdraw his Worshipers, and to dispossess him of his Temples; to promote the Honour of the true God, and bring in everlasting Righteousness among Men. To suppose therefore that the Devil would assist our Saviour in working Miracles, to confirm and countenance a Doctrine so *holy, just, and good*, a Doctrine that taught and engaged Men to abhor his Worship, to detest his Counsels, and to wage eternal War against his

his Kingdom, is to suppose, that the Father of Lies would tell Truth, in order to confound himself, and that the old Serpent, which had deceived almost the whole World, was at last grown so exceeding foolish as to assist his Enemies to ruin his own Authority. He that can swallow such palpable Absurdities as these are deserves to be pitied, but has no Right to be argued with, and wants not Conviction, so much as common Sense to be a Christian.

And now the Argument upon the Whole stands thus. The Works appealed to by our Saviour in Proof of his Divine Mission, were plain and visible Effects, surpassing Human Strength and Contrivance, and contrary to the Natural Causes of Things, and must therefore have been derived from a Power superiour to Man, and communicated to him by some Spiritual Agent. But then seeing that some of these Works were in *their Nature*, and all of them in *their Circumstances*, such as to be utterly incapable of being performed by the Assistance or Co-operation of Evil Spirits, it necessarily follows, that they must have been performed by the extraordinary Interposition, or the immediate and special Appointment, of God himself: That is, in short, to say, that *no Man could do those Miracles that he did except God were with him.* But and if God was with him in the Works that he wrought, it no less evidently follows, that God was also with him in the Doctrine that he preached; and the Inference, that *he was a Teacher come from God*, must be allowed valid and indisputable; or else we must so far abandon our Reason as to think, that infinite Goodness and Truth would vouch for a cursed Imposture;

Imposture. So that he that believeth not on Christ for the sake of those Works which God enabled him to do, is not only a Liar himself, but hath made God a Liar, because he believeth not the Record that God gave of his Son.

And now if this be not good Proof of the Truth of the *Christian* Religion, there never yet has been, nor, I believe, ever will be, such Proof of any instituted Religion whatsoever. I was indeed a going to say there never can be; but that I durst not determine what Almighty Power cannot do, or what Infinite Wisdom cannot contrive. Be that as it will, this I am sure of, that we have *sufficient* Reasons to believe on Jesus; and Reasons *more than sufficient* no Man can justly demand, and much less in Matters of Faith ought to desire. And I defy the most subtil of our Adversaries to describe that *Evidence* on which they will own themselves obliged to submit to any future Revelation, I mean an Evidence truly *rational*, and not wholly irresistible, which shall be found liable to fewer Exceptions than that which has been given already for the *Gospel Revelation*. So that in this Case if we are in an Error, yet it must be acknowledged we are in the Right to continue so. And if Christianity were really false, yet it would be a sinful Obstinacy not to believe it to be true.

To say any more upon this Subject here might be justly resented, as implying a Suspicion that some of you were weak, and needed to be confirmed in the Faith; but to say so much will, I hope, be allowed neither improper nor unreasonable. Your very Presence in this Place does indeed sufficiently shew your Hope in Jesus, whose Worship is here taught and professed; but as

it is the standing Duty of every Christian to be ready always to give to every Man that asketh him a Reason of that Hope, so it is more especially necessary at this Time, when the very Fundamentals of the Faith are called in Question, and open and violent Attacks made upon the first Principles of our Religion.

If what I have said in treating upon this Argument is allowed to be well grounded, there can, I think, be no manner of Dispute whether our Saviour's Miracles are a proper and substantial Evidence of his being the *Messiah* promised in the Old Testament. For if, as has been shewn, they are an Evidence of his being a Teacher come from God, and if, as is acknowledged, one of the Doctrines that he taught was his own *Messiahship*, then that he really was the *Messiah* is proved without any more to do: And if this be not a direct and absolute Proof, I think nothing can be so.

It is indeed an additional Proof, and a further Confirmation of this great Truth, that God himself, speaking by the Mouth of his holy Prophets, had declared to the World beforehand, that the *Messias*, when he came, should do among them the Works which none other Man ever did; for instance, should heal the Sick, give Sight to the Blind, Speech to the Dumb, Ears to the Deaf, and Feet to the Lamé: And that Jesus did not only perform these very Works, which it had been antiently predicted the *Messiah* should do, but also many more and vastly greater than these. For the only Use and Intent of God's making this previous Declaration seems to have been to guard against Impostors, and to point out the true *Messias*. And if therefore any other Person

son *falsely* pretending to be so could have exhibited *these* Marks and Signs of him, the Council of God might have been frustrated and rendered of none Effect: Inasmuch as he that could counterfeit the *Messiah* in *this*, could much more easily do so in *any other Character*. But to suppose that an All-wise God would so lay his Designs, as that he might possibly be prevented in them, being as blasphemous as it is absurd, it necessarily follows, that Jesus Christ, by accomplishing the antient Prophecies in this Particular, gave a demonstrative Proof, an Evidence beyond Exception, of his being that Person who was promised to come; and God, by enabling or permitting him to fulfil this the brightest and most glorious Part of the *Messiah's* Character, did, as it were, by a Voice from Heaven, proclaim, that this was he of whom Moses in the Law and the Prophets did write. But then it can by no Means be concluded from hence, that because it had been prophesied that the *Messiah* should work Miracles, that therefore the Miracles performed by Christ are no *absolute* Proofs of his being the *Messiah*; for if they would have been absolute Proofs to ~~some~~ this Purpose, in Case they had not been prophesied of, certainly their being prophesied of can never make them otherwise. Nay, one would think, that this should be so far from lessening, that it should rather corroborate that Evidence which our natural Reason convinces us is given by Miracles; when we find that God himself made choice of them, as a Mark to distinguish by, the greatest Prophet that he ever did or will send into the World.

Vain therefore was the Pretence of a late noted Patron of Infidelity, that ' Christ's Mi-
' racles

' racles were in no other Sense a Proof of his
 ' being the *Messiah*, than as they fulfilled an
 ' antient Prophecy relating to him; and no
 less vain and ridiculous was his Demand, under
 that Pretence, to let aside the Consideration
 of *these* Works in this Enquiry; when yet this
 very Consideration is, of all others, the most
 likely and proper to decide the Matter in De-
 bate. The Question is, whether Jesus Christ
 is the *Messiah* promised to the *Jews*, and deli-
 neated in the Old Testament. We assert, that
 he is; and to make good our Assertion observe,
 that he did not only perform such Works as
 it had been foretold the *Messiah* should; but al-
 so such as no one that was not endued with
 Power from on High could do. Now by this we
 know that he was a Man of God, and that the
 Word of the Lord in his Mouth was Truth. When
 therefore he so often and openly declared, that
 he himself actually was the *Messiah*, we must
 either acknowledge him to be so, or deny the
 Veracity of God. It may, perhaps, be sug-
 gested here, that the *Messiah* had been descri-
 bed under several other Marks besides the
 Power of working Miracles, and that if Je-
 sus would make good his Pretensions, he must
 fill up those other Parts of the *Messiah's* Cha-
 racter as well as this. We grant it; but affirm
 withal, that a Power of working such, and
 so many, and so great Miracles as Jesus did,
 is a Mark so *discriminating*, that no Impostor
 could possibly exhibit it. We may therefore
 fairly conclude, we have all the Reason in
 the World to presume, that, under whatever
 Marks and Characters the promised *Messiah*
 had been pre-signified, Jesus Christ did actually
 fulfil them all; altho' our own Short-sighted-
 ness

ness should not suffice to discern the Completion in every Particular. And that, if there are any Prophecies supposed to relate to the *Messiah*, which were certainly not fulfilled in Jesus, then those Prophecies are falsely interpreted, and really have not that Reference they are supposed to have. The Reason of all this is obvious. Antient Prophecies are obscure, and the Application of prophesied Marks and Characters is uncertain. Clearly to unfold the one, and justly to apply the other, requires, for the most Part, vast Attention and an uncommon Sagacity. But *supernatural* Works are the Evidence of Sense, and that such of them as are not performable by *evil* Spirits do proclaim the Finger of God, is the Conclusion of common Reason.

But this, it seems, is a Point which we need not labour at present to make good, as being what was given up by the Adversary I am now speaking of. He grounded his Charge against Christianity upon a Pretence, not that Christ failed to do so much, but that he took upon him to do more than he should do. Not that every Prophecy relating to the Messiah was not fulfilled in Jesus, but that Jesus pretended to fulfil some Prophecies as relating to the Messiah, when in Truth those Prophecies had no manner of Relation to him. That is to say, in short, that our Saviour misapplied the Scriptures to serve his Turn, and interpreted the antient Prophecies to a Sense in which they were never intended. But now that they may *possibly* be thus applied and interpreted is plain, because they have *actually* been so applied and interpreted both by *Jews* and Christians of the greatest Learning and Sagacity. The only
Question

Question is, whether they *must* and *ought* to be understood and treated in this Manner ; whether the Exposition is *true* and the Application *just*. And how can this Question be better or more properly decided than by appealing to the Judgment of one, upon whom, as appears by his Works, *the Spirit of God rested, the Spirit of Wisdom and Understanding, the Spirit of Counsel and of Knowledge* ? We know that our Saviour acted by the *Power of God*, and therefore we rationally conclude, that he spake by the *Spirit of God*. And surely that very Spirit which *endited* the Scriptures is able to give the most authentick *Exposition* of them.

This one Observation is of itself sufficient to invalidate the main and fundamental Argument upon which all this Author's late Writings against Christianity are grounded. As therefore it is needless, it would be now ungenerous to pursue him any further. We leave him in the Hands of a merciful God, to whom he is gone to give an Account of the wilful Abuse and mis-employment of those uncommon Talents both of Parts and Learning wherewith he was entrusted ; and charitably hope and believe that our Saviour will deal more favourably with him in the other World, than he thought fit to deal with our Saviour in this.

As I have taken such particular Notice of one, it may perhaps be expected that I should not wholly pass over in Silence another Scribler in the same Cause, who has written with less Art and Subtilty indeed, but equal Virulence and Prophaness with the other. His design is, as he professes himself, to destroy the great Argument for the Truth of Christianity drawn
from

from the *miraculous* Power of its Author. And to this Purpose he sets himself to prove these two Things: (1st.) That the Miracles of healing all manner of bodily Diseases, which Jesus was justly famed for, are none of the proper Miracles of the *Messiah*, neither are they so much as a good Proof of his Divine Authority to found a Religion. And (2dly) That the *literal* History of many of his Miracles, as recorded by the Evangelists, does imply such Absurdities, Improbabilities, and Incredibilities, that it must needs be supposed they either in Whole or in Part were never wrought, as they are commonly believed now-a-days; but were only related as *Prophetical* and *Parabolical* Narratives of what would be *mysteriously* done by him. And that therefore when Jesus appeals to his Miracles as to a Testimony and Witness of his Divine Authority, he could not properly and ultimately refer to those that he *literally* is said to have wrought in the *Flesh*, but to those *Mystical* ones which he would do in the *Spirit*, of which those wrought in the *Flesh* were mere Types and Shadows.' As to the First of these Heads I have, I hope, sufficiently proved, that the Power which Jesus exerted in performing all and each of those wonderful Works, which we call his *Miracles*, was not only *Supernatural*, but *Divine*; and that consequently they were a very proper and sufficient Evidence of his being the Person whose Character he assumed, and the most rational Seal that ever was exhibited, or can be required of a Commission from God. And as to the Second, it will be enough to observe, that any other antient History may, with equal Reason

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and the like Method of arguing, be turned into Allegory, as well as that of the Evangelists ; that for Instance the Conspiracy of *Catiline* against the *Roman State* was only *parabolical*, and the Conquest of *Caesar* over the *Gauls* a *figurative Allusion*. If the Facts relating to those Occurrences are attended with manifest Absurdities, and recorded with contradictory Circumstances ; this indeed will be a very good Argument to suspect, that the Narratives of *Caesar* and *Sallust* are false, but no Argument at all to prove that they are *enigmatical*. And the Conclusion which any rational Man would draw from such an Observation would be this : Not that the Facts related by those Authors are not to be *literally* understood, but that those Authors were Liars and meant to impose upon the World. And the same is to be said of the Gospel-Historians. If their Narratives of the Life and Actions of Christ are plainly absurd and contradictory, then they must be rejected as *false Histories*, and not received as *Parabolical Fictions*. And whether indeed there are any Absurdities and Contradictions to be met with in them must be left to the Judgment of those that read them. I am sure what this Author has represented as such, can be thought so only by them that take Scurillity for Wit, and Blasphemy for Reasoning. All therefore that I need further observe is only this ; that the greatest Part of the World embraced Christianity merely upon the Credit of these Facts as related by the *Evangelists* ; and that as they were under the highest Obligations, so they had the best Opportunities of being satisfied in the *Truth* of their Relation.

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The Vanity and Unsuccessfulness of these Attempts to destroy Christianity have put the Enemies thereof upon bringing about their Design by a different Method. And tho' they find it impossible to prove, that the Evidence for the Gospel-Revelation is *insufficient*, yet they hope to carry on the Cause of Infidelity as effectually, by shewing that the Gospel-Revelation itself is *needless*. This is an old threadbare Argument, that has been often urged and as often refuted. It was in vain made use of in the early Times of Christianity by *Julian* the Apostate, and has ever since, but chiefly in these latter Days, been as unsuccessfully employed by others, who are equal to him in nothing but that Crime, which has made his Memory infamous to all Generations. To this Purpose it is *now* observed, that CHRISTIANITY is AS OLD AS THE CREATION, that what is called the Religion of Jesus is in Reality nothing else but the Religion of Nature. That the Religion of Nature requires no other Instructor but the Light of Reason. That the Light of Reason is actually sufficient to instruct Men in all the Duties of Morality; in all those very Duties which are pretended to be laid upon them in the Gospel. Hence it is insinuated, that the Gospel-Revelation was not wanted, but is altogether *superfluous and unnecessary*. That it is not agreeable to the Wisdom of God to make a special Revelation from Heaven of those Things, which all Mankind either did or might know without it. That therefore there never actually was such a Revelation from Heaven, as that of the Gospel is represented to be; and that even a Pretence of Miracles to prove it so, tho' attended with all the Evidence that any Matter

of Fact is capable of having, is not to be regarded. In short, that tho' the Christian Religion cannot in strict Propriety of Speech be said to be *false*, inasmuch as to the *Moral* Part of it (and in which the Life and Substance of every Religion consist) it is founded in the highest Reason: Yet so far as it assumes the Character of a *Divine Revelation* it is plainly counterfeit; and consequently in all such Points as pass Understanding, or seem to cross upon Reason, or are mere positive Institutions, it ought to be given up and despised as the Result either of Fraud or of Superstition. And thus by shewing that the Gospel-Revelation is *needleless*, they suppose they have given Christianity as mortal a Blow, as they could have done by proving that the *Evidence* for it is *false*. And so indeed they have done, if we will but allow, that the Principle they go upon has any better Foundation to support it than their own vain Imaginations. For if *Human Reason* be really a full and sufficient Guide in Matters of Religion, then, as every Man's Pride will make him think his own Reason the best, there must be almost as many Religions as there are Men in the World: The natural and genuine Consequence of which is, that in a very short Time there would be no Religion at all. But now not to observe, that of those Points which are deliver'd in the Gospel, there are some that never could be, and others that never were in Fact, discovered by our natural Faculties; and that however Morality might subsist in *Theory* upon the Foot of *Human Reason*, it is impossible it should ever subsist in *Practice*, but upon the Foot of *Divine Revelation*, as well for want of *Authority* to ascertain it, as of *Motives* to enforce

force it : I say, not now to take Notice of these Things, it shall suffice to our present Purpose to observe, that the very same Argument which proves the *Truth*, proves likewise the *Usefulness* and *Necessity*, of the Gospel-Revelation. For if the Gospel-Revelation did actually come from God, then we are sure it must be *needful* and *expedient*, inasmuch as nothing can come from God that is trifling and useless. But that the Gospel-Revelation did actually come from God, the *Miracles* which attended the Publication of it is an unexceptionable Proof.

Here therefore let the pious Christian fix his Foot, and his Faith will be founded upon a Rock that is not to be shaken. There are two Ways, which the Enemies of Christianity at present make use of, in order to subvert it. The one is by exposing the *Evidence* for it as *insufficient*; the other by representing the *Subject Matter* of it as *unnecessary*. Now, on whichever Side they make their Attacks, we shall stand prepared to receive them. For we know that the Testimony of *Miracles* is the Testimony of *God*; and we are sure that God would not give in his Testimony either to a *Lye* or to a *Trifle*. That as he is too good to abuse his Almighty Power to an *ill* Purpose, so he is likewise too wise to disorder the Course of Nature to *no* Purpose at all. Would therefore our free-thinking Infidels but shew themselves Masters of that Reason they so mightily boast of, do they really hope to gain any other Profelytes than such as discredit their Cause, as it will be sufficient, so it will be necessary, for them to make out one of these three Things : Either that Jesus Christ did not work *divine Miracles* ;
or,

or, that divine Miracles are not a *false Evidence* of his being sent from God; or that God would send him into the World either upon a *false* or a *needless* Errand. And if indeed they will set themselves to argue upon all or either of these Points in a plain, open, and serious Manner, every honest and conscientious Christian will think himself bound in Duty to hearken to them with Attention, and to judge of what they say, with Impartiality. But if, as is generally the Case, instead of this, they assault him with Arguments that he does not understand, and puzzle him with Quibbles that he cannot unravel, this will be so far from staggering his Belief, that it will rather confirm and establish it; when he finds the Issue of the Cause is so industriously put, not so much upon the Strength of their Reasoning, as upon the Weakness of his Understanding.

I am sensible I must have tired your Patience, and therefore shall shut up all with one very short and I fear but too seasonable an Inference at this Time.

Seeing it is impossible to reject Christianity and turn Infidel without imputing those Works that were wrought by the *Holy Ghost* to the *Spirits of Devils*, all Approaches to Apostacy and Infidelity must be exceeding dangerous and dreadful. Such as are ridiculing and scoffing at Things sacred; a knavish perverting of the Holy Scriptures; a decrying of the Gospel-Institutions; a Dis-regard for Christ's Ministers; an Intimacy with Atheistical Men, and Delight in their Company; a wilful Obstinacy in a vicious Course, and a stupid Indifferency in Matters of Religion. These are all Degrees of, and are very likely in the End to terminate in,

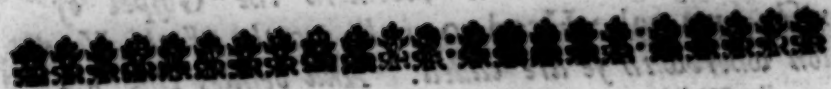
in, *that Sin*, which is so heinous and provoking above all others, that it is declared to be in a peculiar Manner unpardonable both in this World and in the World to come.

Wherefore, my beloved Brethren, *continue ye in the Faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the Hope of the Gospel which ye have heard*: Neither be ye as Children tossed to and fro, and carried about with every Wind of Doctrine, by the Slight of Men and cunning Craftiness whereby they lie in Wait to deceive. But stand ye fast in the Faith, quit you like Men, be strong. Only let your Conversation be as it becometh the Gospel of Christ, and take Heed to walk worthy of the Vocation wherewith ye are called. And besides this giving all Diligence, add to your Faith Vertue, and all the other distinguishing Graces of a Christian. Be in Practice as you are in Profession, and let your Faith appear by your Works. Thus you will make your Calling and Election sure, and so an Entrance shall be ministred unto you abundantly into the everlasting Kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Now the God of all Grace, who hath called us in to his eternal Glory by Christ Jesus, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you. To him be Glory and Dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

F I N I S.

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ing all Delights, add to your Faith, Hope, and
all the other distinguishing Graces of a Chri-
stian. Be in Peace, my Brethren, and let your
and let your Faith, Hope, and Election live, and
you will make your Calling and Election sure, and
to an Everlasting Kingdom of our Lord and
Father, who is the everlasting King of our Lord and

E R R A T A.

Page 9: Line 1. for undistinguished, read undis-
tinguished. l. 20. for where, r. were. p. 13. l. 36.
for of, r. in. l. 4. p. 18. for the, r. this. p. 10.
l. 8. r. out of their Sight.

F I N I S



